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# President Says He Intends To Keep Gadhafi Off Balance

## *Reagan Denies Domestic Disinformation*

By David Hoffman  
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President Reagan said yesterday that he wants to make Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi "go to bed every night wondering what we might do" to deter terrorism, but he denied that a plan he approved in August involved the spread of "disinformation" through the American news media.

Reagan was responding to a report yesterday in The Washington Post that the administration launched a secret effort of deception aimed at convincing Gadhafi that he was about to be attacked again by U.S. bombers and perhaps ousted in a coup.

The secret plan was outlined in a three-page memo sent to Reagan by national security affairs adviser John M. Poindexter. It called for "real and illusionary events—through a disinformation program—with the basic goal of making Gadhafi think that there is a high degree of internal opposition to him within Libya, that his key trusted aides are disloyal, that the U.S. is about to move against him militarily."

Other administration officials said yesterday that the plan was approved by Reagan in a secret National Security Decision Directive that authorized the Central Intelligence Agency to spread false information about Gadhafi abroad and also ordered a series of U.S. military movements designed to frighten the Libyan leader.

Secretary of State George P. Shultz told reporters in New York last night that he knew of "no decision to have people go out and tell lies to the media" but that "if there are ways in which we can make Gadhafi nervous, why shouldn't we?"

"Frankly, I don't have any problems with a little psychological warfare against Gadhafi. It's very easy. You people in the media enjoy not allowing the United States to do anything in secret, if you can help it," he said.

Shultz noted Winston Churchill's statement in World War II that "in time of war the truth is so precious it must be attended by a bodyguard of lies," adding that "insofar as Gadhafi is concerned we don't have a declaration of war but we have something darn close to it."

Presidential spokesman Larry Speakes said Poindexter had told him there was no effort by the U.S. government to spread disinformation in the American media. Speakes said a report in The Wall Street Journal about Libya last August included intelligence information on Gadhafi that was "generally correct," although he said the newspaper had included "inflammatory stuff" in its report. After the Journal story appeared Aug. 25, Speakes had described it as "authoritative."

Speakes said yesterday that he had no comment on whether the administration had spread false information about Gadhafi outside the United States.

Reagan, meeting with a group of newspaper columnists and broadcast commentators at the White House yesterday, at first said, "I challenge the veracity of that entire story" published in The Post yesterday. But he then said the administration had been paying close attention to Gadhafi and "I can't deny" that "here and there, they're going to have something to hang it on."

Asked whether there were memos describing a deliberate effort to mislead the American people, Reagan said: "Those I challenge. They were not a part of any meeting I've ever attended."

Pressed further about whether the administration intentionally put out false information, Reagan recalled arguments about using nuclear weapons in Vietnam while he was California governor.

"And I said at the time that, while we knew that we were never going to use nuclear weapons there, we should never say that," he said. "We

should just let them go to bed every night wondering whether we might use those weapons. Well, the same thing is true with someone like Gadhafi and with all the speculation that was going on in the media throughout the world about whether our action would tempt him into further acts or not.

"And constantly there were questions—aimed at me as to were we planning anything else. My feeling was, I wouldn't answer those questions. My feeling was just the same thing—he should go to bed every night wondering what we might do.

A senior administration official closely involved with the Libya plan took issue with The Post account in a briefing for newspaper columnists and broadcasters at the White House. He described as "absolutely false" the "implication that somehow the U.S. government had initiated or that the president had authorized a program of disinformation for the American media." He added, "You must distinguish between the audiences, you must distinguish between deception and disinformation."

The Post account said that beginning with the Aug. 25 Wall Street Journal report, the American news media reported as fact much of the false information generated by the Poindexter plan. Published articles described renewed Libyan backing for terrorism and a looming, new U.S.-Libya confrontation.

But the Poindexter memo said U.S. intelligence had actually concluded in August that Gadhafi was "quiescent" on the terrorist front.

Yesterday, Speakes said some facets of the Journal article were correct, although "not necessarily the conclusion or speculation." One assertion that he said was correct was that there was "growing evidence" that U.S. air raids April 14 in Libya had not ended Libyan-sponsored terrorism.

A senior administration official, speaking at the same White House briefing, said that the evidence began coming in after July 15. This included an "increasing number of reports," he said, that Gadhafi was shifting the people involved in terrorist attacks from People's Bureaus to Libyan Arab Airlines offices.

Asked yesterday whether the administration had a policy against spreading disinformation, Speakes said he was not aware of one but that other government agencies such as the U.S. Information Agency had policies barring it.

Meanwhile yesterday, administration sources said the Justice Department plans to ask the Federal Bureau of Investigation to conduct an inquiry into yesterday's Post story. The probe would be referred to a new unit in the FBI's Washington Field Office that was set up under a reorganization last spring to assign veteran agents to pursue leaks of classified information. An FBI spokesman said such leaks are difficult to investigate and that hundreds of such probes have resulted in only one indictment.

Members of the congressional intelligence committees refused to comment. Bernard McMahon, staff director of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said the initial reaction of some of the members has been curiosity. "I don't know even the extent to which there was such a plan," he said. "We have asked for the details . . . . We're taking a look at it." A

The administration plan drew criticism yesterday.

"I think it was one of the most important and depressing stories I've read in a long time," said A.M. Rosenthal, executive editor of The New York Times. "The implications that our government was sitting around figuring out how to lie to the press makes me rather ill. It makes you ask a lot of questions. Who authorized this kind of thing? Has it happened before? Who's going to believe these people again?"

*Staff writers David B. Ottaway, Lena Sun and Howard Kurtz contributed to this report.*